

LIFE AND DEATH IN ASSISTED LIVING

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With America's population of seniors growing faster and living longer than ever before, more families are turning to assisted living facilities to help their loved ones age in comfort and safety. But are some in the loosely regulated, multibillion-dollar assisted living industry putting the lives of those loved ones at risk? FRONTLINE and ProPublica explore that question in *Life and Death in Assisted Living*.

From a Texas assisted living resident who froze to death on Christmas morning to the Hall of Fame football player who drank unsecured toxic dishwashing liquid and died 11 days later, this major investigation raises questions about fatal lapses in care and a quest for profits at one of America's best known assisted living companies.

It is one of the most important and difficult decisions anyone can make: Who should we trust with the care of our aging parents? The once-promising concept of assisted living took shape in the United States two decades ago as an earnest effort to create an alternative to nursing homes for America's aging population. Today, nearly 750,000 people live in assisted living facilities across the country. National for-profit chains, concerned both about caring for their residents and pleasing their shareholders, have come to dominate the industry. Standards for care and training—and even definitions for the term “assisted living”—vary from state to state. Assisted living facilities, unlike nursing homes, are not regulated by the federal government. Meanwhile, those coming in to assisted living facilities, year after year, are sicker and frailer, and many of them are afflicted with dementia.

Emeritus Senior Living, the country's largest assisted living operator and one of its largest dementia care providers, has the ability to house some 37,000 elderly Americans in more than 400 facilities across the country. Its top executives have made millions. Emeritus holds itself out as the industry leader, one eager to expand further, even internationally. But in some states, regulators have cited the company in the deaths of residents. Other officials have regularly found the company's facilities to be understaffed and their employees to be inadequately trained. Some current and former executives say the push to fill facilities and maximize revenues has left staff overwhelmed and the care of residents endangered.

This investigation adds a new dimension to conversations about the best place for the aging population.

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